



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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Dear Coastal Dungeness Crab Fisher:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the structure for the opening of the coastal Dungeness crab fishery for the 2006-2007 season. There are several matters that the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) have been working on in preparation for the next coastal Dungeness crab season including conducting crab condition testing, coordinating with the states of Oregon and California, and negotiating management plans with the coastal treaty Indian tribes. As you know, many of the specifics of the state management structure depend on the outcome of these issues.

At this time, the Department has completed the first round of test fishing and we have been awaiting a weather window to conduct our second test. California and Oregon have conducted their first tests and are also waiting for a break in the weather to conduct their second tests. We have concluded state-tribal harvest agreements with the Makah and Quileute tribes; however, we have not completed our deliberations with the Quinault Indian Nation. We will mail you specific information in a subsequent mailing regarding area closures and other management measures associated with these agreements and our legal obligations to meet our harvest sharing obligations with the coastal treaty Indian tribes.

Test Fishing Results

By agreement, each of the three West Coast state's fish and wildlife agencies conduct pre-season test fishing and follow protocols for opening the coastal commercial Dungeness crab season based on criteria established by the Coastal Dungeness Crab Tri-State Dungeness Crab Committee. The criteria for opening the season on December 1 are a meat recovery rate (or projected rate) of 23% north of Cascade Head and 25% south of Cascade Head.

The Department completed the Westport portion of Washington's test on October 30, 2006, and the Long Beach portion was completed on October 26, 2006. Crabs were collected from three stations at each area; strings of pots were set at 15, 30, and 45 fathoms at each station. All legal sized male crab caught were included in the meat recovery sample. While aboard the charter vessels, Department staff collected shell condition data on all crab collected from all depths and stations. The results for both areas are summarized below.

	<u>1A</u>	<u>1B</u>	<u>II</u>	<u>III</u>	<u>Meat Recovery</u>
Westport	16.3%	31.1%	52.6%	0.0%	21.0%
Long Beach	5.4%	25.6%	69.0%	0.0%	22.0%

State Season Structure

As the coastal treaty tribes have expanded their fishing fleet and asserted their treaty rights to harvest crab north of Point Chehalis, state-tribal agreements have been more difficult to reach and the restrictions placed on the state's fleet have intensified. This has made structuring the state season more difficult, in part as a result of delayed starts north of Point Chehalis and larger area closures. These issues, in addition to the uncertainty associated with delays related to poor crab condition; have made planning for the start of the season very difficult for all of us. The Coastal Dungeness Crab Advisory Board and other industry members have assisted the Department in trying to craft a state management structure that provides state license holders an equitable opportunity to participate in the harvest along the Washington coast. The last two seasons have been subject to lengthy delays caused by poor crab condition. These lengthy statewide delays have been longer than the delays north of Point Chehalis specified in our state-tribal harvest sharing agreements; some might say we have been lucky. This year that is unlikely to be the case given the meat pick-out rates observed in our first test are relatively close to the opening rate of 23%.

In mid-August, the Department began working with the crab advisors to develop options for opening the fishery in Washington if the crab condition allowed for an earlier start than the state-tribal agreements. The Department held a number of meetings with the advisors and other interested participants. After lengthy discussions, no one option or approach had the support of a cross-section of sectors and representatives.

The Department has weighed and considered the wide-range of advice and input we received. In particular, we considered the input from those who attended our meeting in Montesano on November 8 where seven specific options were discussed. In consideration of what we heard, what we know relative to our state-tribal agreements, and our desire to give each license holder an equitable opportunity to harvest crab, we intend to implement the following fishery plan for the 2006-2007 season.

Point Chehalis to the Washington-Oregon Border:

The coastal Dungeness crab commercial fishery will open to state fishers from Point Chehalis (46°53.30) to the WA/OR border (46°15.00), including Willapa Bay, on December 1, 2006. The December 1 opening date is contingent on the statewide meat pick-out rate meeting or exceeding 23% pursuant to the Tri-State testing criteria and will be subject to the adjacent Oregon waters opening simultaneously with Washington.

- a. Fishers participating in the fishery south of Point Chehalis will be required to temporarily use a reduced pot limit. Fishers with permanent pot limits of 500 and 300 will be allowed to use 300 or 200 pots, respectively. Unused buoy tags must be on board vessels engaged in fishing in this area. The temporary pot limit reduction will be removed when the area north of Point Chehalis opens.

- b. Fishers who choose to fish in the area between Point Arena, California and Point Chehalis, Washington before the area north of Point Chehalis opens will be prohibited from fishing north of Point Chehalis for 45 days after the area north of Point Chehalis opens.

Point Chehalis to Destruction Island:

The state commercial fishery will open from Point Chehalis to Destruction Island (47°40.50) after the Quinault Indian Nation has been provided a 40-day head start.

- a. You can expect certain areas, known as Special Management Areas (SMA), to be closed to the state fishery. These area closures will be specified in a subsequent mailing to each license holder.
- b. Fishers that participate in the fishery south of Point Chehalis (Point Arena, CA to Point Chehalis, WA) before the area north of Point Chehalis opens are prohibited from fishing north of Point Chehalis for 45 days after this area opens.
- c. Fishers will be subject to their permanent pot limit (300 or 500).

Destruction Island to Sand Point:

The state commercial fishery will open from Destruction Island to Sand Point (48°07.00) on January 16, 2007.

- a. This area will have an SMA that is closed to state fishers. The SMA is the same as the one that was in place last year and will be specifically described in a subsequent mailing.

Sand Point to U.S.-Canada Border:

The state commercial fishery will open from Sand Point to the U.S.-Canadian border on the same day that the area from Point Chehalis to Destruction Island opens.

- a. This area will have an SMA that is closed to state fishers. The SMA is the same as the one that was in place last year and will be specifically defined in a subsequent mailing.

Common Requirements:

- a. The season opening date in all areas, except Destruction Island to Sand Point, will be preceded by a 64-hour gear soak period.

- b. Vessel hold inspections will be conducted the day prior to the openings, except for the area between Destruction Island and Sand Point.
- c. During vessel hold inspections, vessel operators will be required to declare if their intent is to fish south of Point Chehalis before the area to the north of Point Chehalis opens.
- d. All license holders will be required to carry, complete, and submit logbooks to the Department. At the time of the hold inspection, vessel operators will be provided a logbook and instructions. This information will greatly assist us in managing our fishery in the future.

The pre-season planning process for the 2006-2007 fishery has been very difficult and challenging for all of us. I am sorry we could not include the tribal SMA information in this mailing, but we are still in discussions with the Quinault Indian Nation. The SMAs north of Destruction Island will be the same as last year. We will get a complete description out to you as soon as possible.

Thanks to all of you who have contributed your thoughts and expertise to the process. These decisions are for one year. I know we will learn more about the fishery this year and we will try to make improvements next year. Have a safe and prosperous season.

Sincerely,



Philip Anderson, Assistant Director
Intergovernmental Resource Management

PA:dak

cc: Jeff Koenings
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